

Hand-in-Hand

Jesse S. Vogtle, Jr., AWF President

On August 8, 2020, I was both humbled and honored by the vote of confidence from the Board of Directors and election as President of the Alabama Wildlife Federation (AWF). Knowing that it coincides with the 85th anniversary of our organization makes it especially meaningful. For over a decade, AWF has been an integral part of my life. I am passionate about AWF, our members across this state who give our organization life and vitality, and the conservation work we accomplish through our combined efforts. What AWF stands for has been a part of the fabric of my life. Hunting, angling, spending time in the outdoors, and striking the balance between use, management, and protection of our wildlife, forests, fish, water, and soil are important to me personally just as they are to AWF.

My outdoor pursuits began with squirrel hunting in my early teens. I can still remember my first .22 rifle given to me by my dad. In those days, a small woodlot was all I needed and it felt like my personal thousand acres. Squirrels or not, just being in the woods was a fine day in my book. I added dove hunting next and today still, wing-shooting is one of my favorite outdoor pursuits. In college, I had the chance to see, hunt, and fish with friends in other parts of the state. What impressed me most about that experience was the unique and deep camaraderie that exists among people who share quality time together in the outdoors. It had such an impact that me and three of my college buddies found some land to lease in Dallas County in 1985 and formed the first hunting club with which I was fully engaged. In 1996, a larger group of friends joined together and formed what today is known as Riverbend Hunting Club. Most of the original founding members are still together twenty-four years later and, thanks to Mrs. Ann Payne of Livingston, we continue that great outdoor-inspired camaraderie on a long-term lease in Greene County.

My list of favorite outdoor pursuits these days has expanded to include duck hunting and duck dogs, chasing turkeys, and fly-fishing. But without question, the most important element added to that list has been engaging my family in the outdoors. I have been blessed with a wonderful wife (Laura) and five exceptional children (Stringer, Hays, Alli, Rhoades, and Florie). It has been important to me and my family to share time in the outdoors. Fishing, hunting, and enjoying the lake is all part of what we do. Through those times together, it gives me the chance to share with them the things I have learned through the years, especially during my time with AWF, regarding sustainable use of our natural resources, properly utilizing and sharing the game and fish that we harvest, and the fundamental elements that form a conservation ethic. It allows me as well, to convey the importance of including others in their outdoor experiences and building that unique camaraderie I discovered decades ago. As a result, they too value time spent in the outdoors, sharing it with



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Rhoades Vogtle and Jake Kennedy present Rogers Store Manager, Ms. Ophelia Houston, with a stringer of crappie caught at Woodward's Lake, Sumter County. A neighborhood fish fry immediately followed.



Established in 1996, Riverbend Hunting Club represents 24 years of family/friends enjoying the outdoors. Executive Committee: Paul Sparks, Butch Burkett, Skip Donnell, Jack Darnall, George Elliott, Erwin Raughley, Perry and Clinton Smith, Jesse Vogtle.



Father/Sons trip in 2018 to Buras, Louisiana chasing big ducks. Left to right: Stringer, Hays, Rhoades, and Jesse Vogtle.



Alli and Florie Vogtle on a successful 2017 offshore fishing trip in Key Largo aboard Tom Jernigan's boat the "Slipstream."

friends, and they understand the basic principles of conservation. I look forward to even more outdoor experiences with them, watching their outdoor interests grow, and seeing them inspire others to do the same.

All of the outdoor experiences I have been fortunate to have, and the outdoor mentors I met and learned from along the way, laid the foundation for my enthusiasm and passion for AWF and what we do. Having grown up in the Birmingham area, one of the first things I wanted to do when I came on board with AWF was to grow and expand the Birmingham Cook-off. My motivation was to exponentially expand the number of people who would learn about AWF, what we do, and then become involved in helping AWF achieve our conservation mission. Thanks to a great group of local AWF friends and passionate AWF supporters, like Charlie Carper who has cooked in virtually every AWF Birmingham Wild Game Cook-off since inception, we were able to triple the reach, size, and impact of that cook-off. The result – more AWF members, increased volunteer and financial support for AWF's work, and greater mission achievement. Even more impressive is the fact that Jack Darnall, who now leads the AWF Birmingham Wild Game Cook-off Committee, has taken it up another notch.

I am biased, but it is truly impressive when you look at all we are accomplishing thanks to the efforts of AWF members and supporters across this state. In 2019, over 50,000 people visited Lanark, home to AWF State Headquarters and our Alabama Nature Center facility. The majority of those visitors were youth and school groups participating in hands-on outdoor education programs led by our professional instructors. Over 280 schools around the state are enrolled in our Alabama Outdoor Classroom program. Our Outdoor Classroom staff are helping schools design, build, and utilize those sites to connect students with the outdoors and teach them about being good stewards of our outdoor resources. Our wildlife biologists on a daily basis are helping landowners develop strategies for managing their lands to provide quality wildlife habitat and wildlife populations. This is where the rubber meets the road in wildlife management and I am proud of the work we do to assist landowners and wildlife.

Even though COVID-19 has prevented us from having our AWF Wild Game Cook-offs, we had a record setting year with cook-offs in 2019. We will get through this and we are anxious to gather up with our members across the state for our Wild Game Cook-offs as soon as we do. We were able to design a COVID-sensitive AWF Wild Game Cook-off State Finals competition back in August so our local winning cook-teams could compete for the coveted

“AWF Wild Game Cook-Off State Champion” title. Take a look on page 33 in this issue of Alabama Wildlife to find out who won.

We are also excited about new projects and initiatives. The AWF Board of Directors voted in August to launch the AWF Nearshore Artificial Reef Zone Build-Out Plan. Working with the Alabama Marine Resources Division, we designed a plan and approach to fully build-out the reef zone with 26 new artificial reefs. I want to personally thank Alabama Power Company for their partnership with AWF to deploy on August 20th, the first of the 26 reefs. AWF and Alabama Power Company teamed up in 2016 for a major reef deployment and this project further expands on that partnership. I also want to thank my friend and AWF Cypress Society member, Lee Edwards, for sponsoring two of the 26 reefs in memory of his brother Sterling Edwards. His quick action allowed us to take advantage of a large supply of reef material that will ultimately support multiple reefs within the AWF Nearshore Artificial Reef Zone. Without that support, a unique opportunity would have been missed. Take the time to read about the August 20th deployment and the Build-Out Plan on page 8 of this issue. If you would like to sponsor and name a reef in support of the Build-Out plan, contact Tim Gothard, AWF Executive Director, at 334-285-4550.

We have also recently acquired 70 additional acres adjoining Lanark that will be used as a Working Forest and Wildlife Demonstration Area. This project will enable us to show how forest and wildlife management go hand-in-hand and demonstrate the type of management that our Land Stewardship Assistance Biologists help private landowners implement. We look forward to sharing with you in the next issue of Alabama Wildlife, more details about this project, including the entity that has been key to making it a reality.

On October 1st in Birmingham, we held an AWF 85th Anniversary Dinner and Auction that went exceptionally well. This event was conducted in a COVID-sensitive manner (outdoor venue, limited attendance, proper social distancing, masks per mask order, no self-serve food or drink) and provided an opportunity to celebrate AWF’s 85-year history and glance ahead at the next 85 years. Take a look on page 6 for some snapshots from the event and stay tuned – we may do something similar in another area or two.

The take home message is simply this – 1) AWF is a great organization with great members all across Alabama; (2) AWF members are passionate about what AWF stands for and what we do; and (3) AWF members using their individual and collective talents have made AWF a meaningful part of the States conservation efforts. That is something every organization strives to achieve but few are able to accomplish. Even in this most unique time, AWF continues to lean forward and move ahead. As AWF President, I want you to know this - I will work hand-in-hand with you to make sure that we continue to make great gains for wildlife conservation and outdoor pursuits in Alabama. AWF has an impressive 85-year history thanks to great AWF people from all across this state. I look forward to writing with you, the next chapter in AWF’s great legacy.

Yours in Conservation.



2017 Mallard Lodge Duck Hunt, Sweet Lake, Louisiana. Bottom Row: Ben Stimpson, Tom Jernigan, Clay Ryan, Matt Bowden, Angus Cooper, Peter Gaillard, Bestor Ward; Top Row: Bo Cross, Will Wilson, Jesse Vogtle.



Grant Lynch handing over the gavel at the installation of AWF President Jesse S. Vogtle, Jr. for the 2020-2021 term at the organization’s Annual Meeting in August.



The AWF Birmingham Wild Game Cook-off has tripled in size and impact. 2018 Overall Winner: Lemay Farms. Charlie Carper, Steve Lemay, Rocco Orlando, Joel Brown, Mike Ray, Curtis Eatman, Tim Saunders, and John Davis. Committee members Jesse Vogtle, Winn Raughley, Will Howell, Sam Donnell, Steele and Jack Darnall.